

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Little, J.I. *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. (Studies on the History of Québec/Études d'histoire du Québec, 2.) Pp. xxii, 368. Illustrations, maps, bibliography and index. \$44.95 cloth

Françoise Noel

Volume 21, Number 2, March 1993

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016805ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016805ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Noel, F. (1993). Review of [Little, J.I. *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. (Studies on the History of Québec/Études d'histoire du Québec, 2.) Pp. xxii, 368. Illustrations, maps, bibliography and index. \$44.95 cloth]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 21(2), 127–128. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016805ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1993

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

applied to the careers of one set of prominent Upper Canadians during a period of about fifty years."

Although Johnson admits that the MHAs he is studying were but one set of prominent Upper Canadians, he contends that they are quite suitable representatives of prominence, with most of them bearing a triple stamp of approval, even if some were surrogates for greater prominence. Most of the members, before becoming provincial politicians, had achieved important local distinction in being appointed as magistrates and officers of the provincial militia. To be so appointed they needed the support of both the local "oligarchy" and the central elite. To this double official stamp of approval was added that of the property-owning portion of the population who were entitled to vote.

In studying 283 MHAs, Johnson assesses biographical information under five broad headings: occupational choice, wealth and land ownership, local office-holding, patronage and status, and the nature of parliamentary representation. In order to measure change over time, and to compensate for the obvious discrepancy in the size of the legislature from seventeen persons in 1792 to seventy in 1841, Johnson artificially creates two groups for the sake of comparison. Group A consists of members serving from 1792 to 1820, in contrast with Group B that consists of members sitting in the House from 1830 to 1841. Sixty-nine pages of this volume are devoted to brief biographies of the MHAs.

So, what do we learn about these regional leaders of Upper Canada? First, farming was the predominant occupation, followed by public service, merchandising, and more distantly by milling and the law. Although farming declined as an occupation as commerce and law became more favoured routes to obtain wealth, it remained the leading occupation. There are few concrete conclusions

that Johnson has deduced about wealth. Wealth was most likely to be associated with mercantile activity, it often was related to non-business activities such as public office, the Scottish were more likely to be wealthy than other national or ethnic groups, and it was best to arrive early and stay in one advantageous spot. The politically prominent sought prosperity through multiple occupations, but for most a political career was firmly grounded on the building blocks of becoming civil magistrates and holding commissions in the militia. These were appointed positions, with the central elite obviously favouring those with pro-administration leanings over Reformers; favouring Anglicans and Presbyterians over Methodists and other dissenters; favouring Scottish and English immigrants over Irish, American- and native-born; and favouring those who were regarded as being particularly loyal and respectable. To be at all perceived as somehow connected with the United States, American democracy and Ireland militated against being appointed to the magistrate and militia officer positions that were key to political success.

In showing that the Irish were virtually absent in civil and military appointments and severely under-represented as elected MHAs, Johnson argues that the bias of the provincial administration effectively worked against the Irish being elected as members. Johnson suggests that this modifies the buoyant conclusions of Donald Akenon about Irish immigrants becoming successful and prospering members of Upper Canadian society. Surely the significant point is how over-represented Scottish immigrants were in the legislature. Considering that most Irish immigrants arrived in Upper Canada during the last dozen of the fifty years under study, they were more likely to be concerned with establishing themselves on farms than with becoming politically prominent. If Ogle Gowan was a rare Irish immigrant member in the Upper

Canadian assembly, the number of Irish elected increased in the union period, only to decline in the decades following Confederation.

This volume is an indispensable reference work in that it offers a province-wide base of information that Johnson uses to appraise previous hypotheses and present general trends. In terms of urban representation, for example, he concludes that Reform candidates made almost no headway in the towns, and that urban property-owning voters identified strongly with the economic outlook of local Conservative candidates and that of the provincial elite. This book has significant implications for the larger historiography of Ontario by revealing the relative significance of ethnicity, nationality and religion in the formative years. It provides a stringent rebuttal to the reckless judgment of an Ontario historian some fifteen years ago that ethnicity had no significance for the immigrant groups scrambling for economic success in Upper Canada.

GLENN LOCKWOOD
Department of History
Carleton University

Little, J.I. *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. (Studies on the History of Quebec/Études d'histoire du Québec, 2.) Pp. xxii, 368. Illustrations, maps, bibliography and index. \$44.95 cloth.

In *Crofters and Habitants* J.I. Little has produced an invaluable case study of a settler society in Winslow township, Quebec. He makes thorough use of the primary sources available using a variety of methodological techniques to extract information from the manuscript censuses, registry office title documents and parish records. The large number of

tables generated enhance the text without unduly imposing on the reader. Equally at home with more traditional documentary sources such as church and school records, he also uses less traditional ones such as the ballads of a local bard. Micro-history at its best, his findings on every topic are presented in the context of the existing secondary literature and comparisons are drawn with well-known studies of other settlement areas such as Peel County and the Saguenay. Detailed maps accompany his findings on settlement; however, a map of the region showing county boundaries and adjacent urban centres would be a useful addition to the discussion of the last two chapters.

Little begins his study, appropriately, with social and economic conditions in the place of origin of its settlers. Two groups are actually studied: the crofters, Scots from the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides and the habitants, French Canadian settlers originating primarily from the nearby seigneurie of Lauzon. Displaced by improving landlords and the potato blight the crofters who chose to settle in Winslow constituted a fairly homogeneous population as did their French Canadian neighbours. Little documents the process of settlement including the problems related to obtaining full title to land, but in the period before 1881, the greatest problem faced by the settlers was the isolation of the region and the lack of good roads.

Organized according to the approaches to family history suggested by Anderson¹ his next three chapters examine the demographic characteristics of the population, family life (the sentiment approach), and the household economy. In the absence of personal documents, the author's discussion of family life focuses primarily on household structure, based on census reports, and on inheritance, based on deeds in gift. He documents

some differences between the crofters and habitants such as the higher fertility rate of the French Canadians, their high infant mortality, their earlier transfer of property from one generation to the next, and their greater participation in the seasonal labour of the timber industry. By 1881 a much higher proportion of adult children still lived at home in Scottish households and fewer of them married. Partible inheritance was rare for both groups and the land was seldom split. The domestic economy was common to both, the geography of this township not lending itself to a high degree of market orientation.

The author then looks at the economic development of the community, the growth of institutions (churches, schools and municipal government) and public morality. Despite their many similarities these two communities remained mutually exclusive. This extended not only to schools and churches but also to municipal government, Winslow having been divided in 1858. Stratification was minimal in both communities. Because agriculture remained at a subsistence level and the timber industry was monopolized by an outside firm the local petty bourgeoisie of millers and merchants remained weak and played only a minor role in local exchange and credit.

This would also account for the weakness of the two villages (St Romain and Stornoway or Bruceville) which emerged in Winslow. Their development, or rather lack of it, and location in the urban hierarchy is not explored systematically but emerges from the discussion on local capital. The district service centre, St Vital de Lambton, and Lake Megantic, which emerged as a boom town when C.S. Clark's monopoly over timber in the region was finally broken by the railroad, were located outside the study area. Outside merchants also provided loans in the form of hypothecs to the French

Canadian population. Discussion of the county council is minimal but the fact that an unpopular railway tax could be imposed on the population by the larger body is suggestive. The author's focus on the township makes it difficult to approach these questions adequately. To do so a broader regional perspective would be necessary.

Marginal areas are seldom chosen for detailed study. This well-documented and lucid study therefore makes an important contribution to our knowledge of the settlement process in nineteenth century British North America/Canada. I have one reservation. The author writes that a desire for "the perpetuation of traditional social ties and cultural values" (p. 27) explains the Scots' choice of Winslow as a place to settle. The marginal lands, limited opportunities and isolation they would face there undoubtedly facilitated the retention of their culture, but it is unlikely that these were fully anticipated. But this in no way detracts from an excellent study.

FRANÇOISE NOEL
Associate Professor of History
Nipissing University College

References

1. Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family, 1500-1914*, (London: Macmillan, 1980).

Dougall, Lily. *What Necessity Knows*. 1893. Reprint with an introduction by Victoria Walker. Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1992. Pp. 445. \$13.95 paper.

Sime, J.G. *Sister Woman*. 1919. Reprint with an introduction by Sandra Campbell. Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1992. Pp. 293. \$14.50 paper.

Reprinted after almost a century of obscurity, these two works of fiction pro-